

How Can I Make My Lifestyle Healthier?

Heart and blood vessel diseases are our nation's No. 1 killer. Nearly 2,400 Americans die each day from them! Meanwhile, over 79 million adult Americans are living with them. Many are struggling to recover from heart attack or stroke, while others at high risk are getting the care and making the changes necessary to lower their risk.

You can do plenty to get your heart in shape, even if you've had a bad experience. Healthy changes will help you feel and look better! Death rates from heart attack, stroke and other cardiovascular diseases are going down. Healthy lifestyles play a big part! Now's the time to make up your mind to take some control over your future. You'll find that once you make one change, the next comes more easily. Here are some simple steps to take:



- Don't smoke.
- Have your blood pressure checked regularly.
- Improve your eating habits.
- Be more physically active.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Have regular medical check-ups.
- Take your medicine, if needed, to control high blood pressure, high cholesterol or diabetes.

How do I stop smoking?

- Make an agreement with yourself to quit.
- Ask your healthcare professional for information and programs that may help.
- Fight the urge by going where smoking isn't allowed, and avoid being around people who smoke.
- Reward yourself when you quit.
- Keep busy doing things that make it hard to smoke, like working in the yard, washing dishes and being more active.
- Remind yourself that smoking causes many diseases, and can harm or kill you and others.
- Ask your family and friends to support you.

How do I change my eating habits?

- Ask your doctor, nurse or licensed nutritionist for help.
- Choose less often foods like egg yolks, fatty meats, skin-on chicken, butter and cream.
- Cut down on saturated fat, *trans* fat, sugar and salt.
- Substitute fat-free or low-fat milk for whole milk.
- Bake, broil, grill, roast and poach — don't fry foods in oil.
- Eat fruits, vegetables, cereals, dried peas and beans, pasta, fish, skinless poultry and lean meats.
- Limit alcohol to one drink a day for women and two for men, and if you don't drink, don't start.

What about physical activity?

- Regular physical activity reduces your risk of heart attack and stroke and makes your heart stronger.
- It helps control your weight and blood pressure, helps you relax, and can improve your mood!
- Check with your doctor before you start if you've been inactive a long time.
- Start slow and build up to a total of 30 to 60 minutes on most or all days of the week.
- Look for chances to be more active. Take 10 to 15-minute walking breaks during the day or after meals.

How can I be more relaxed?

- Take 15 to 20 minutes a day to sit quietly, breathe deeply and think of a peaceful picture.
- Be more active every day.
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink.
- Try to avoid things that upset you, such as rush-hour traffic.
- Change how you respond to difficult situations. Be positive, not negative.

How can I remember to take my medicine?

- Take it at the same time every day.
- Use a weekly pill box with separate compartments for each day or time of day.
- Leave notes to remind yourself.
- Ask family and friends to help remind you.
- Wear a wristwatch with an alarm.
- Try an e-mail reminder or beeper service.

How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit americanheart.org to learn more about heart disease.

3. For information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit StrokeAssociation.org.

We have many other fact sheets and educational booklets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one.

Knowledge is power, so *Learn and Live!*

Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your doctor. For example:

What's the most important change I can make?

What if I go back to bad habits?

Your contribution to the American Heart Association supports research that helps make publications like this possible.

The statistics in this sheet were up to date at publication. For the latest statistics, see the *Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Update* at americanheart.org/statistics.

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